



Dr. Ted Schettler, SEHN's Science Director has said that most people think of health as a feature of an individual. What if health is not simply our personal choices, but also an expression of our policies, the way we organize our communities, and how we use materials like plastics? The modern discipline of environmental health arose in part because we learned that chemicals can cause cancer and air pollution can cause asthma. We also learned that the world is complex. Most of us don't live in a simple, pristine environment where we are exposed to only one or two environmental hazards. Demonstrating what caused our infertility, cancer, or dementia would be so much easier if the world was simple.

So how do we parse out contributors to disease in a complex world, especially if we want to prevent health problems? We use stories. Stories help us organize information in such a way that we can make sense out of many details. Finding the causes of problems like infertility is much like a detective story—you have to track the clues. Paraphrasing the old board game of Clue, sometimes it really is the flame retardant rug in the library with the plastic toy. Doctors use stories (what they would call "cases") to understand patterns that lead to an understanding of causes, diagnoses, and treatments.

Ted and his co-authors have designed just such a story around infertility and reproductive disorders that is part of a narrative series called the [Story of Health](#). Read more about the story in Ted's essay below.

Breast cancer activists were among the first to argue that increasing rates of breast cancer had to be more than the already accepted, known risk factors including reproductive history. Ted authored a book entitled the [Ecology of Breast Cancer](#) that laid out the science on the many factors that create the conditions for breast cancer. A recent webinar sponsored by the Collaborative on Health and the Environment, moderated by Ted, reviewed the newest information on the connections between environmental chemicals and breast cancer risk. [The webinar can be accessed here.](#)

SEHN has been deeply involved in working to understand causation and prevent environmental and public health problems such as infertility and breast cancer. If we can prevent suffering, we have a moral obligation to do so. This is the basis of SEHN's 20-year history harnessing the precautionary principle to environmental policy. The principle gives us the moral mandate of preventing harm in the face of scientific uncertainty.

The goal of the Women's Congress for Future Generations is to find ways to fulfill that moral obligation to present and future generations. The third Congress will be held in Minneapolis on November 3-5<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Schettler will be presenting a workshop at the Congress. Please join us.

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